

Memories Are Golden by ej_writer

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Cheesy, Gender Non-Conforming Billy Hargrove, Implied Sexual Content, Implied/Referenced Homophobia, M/M, Not Canon Compliant, Prom, Sibling Bonding, Slow Dancing, Tooth-Rotting Fluff, Underage Drinking

Language: English

Characters: Barbara "Barb" Holland, Billy Hargrove, Heather Holloway, Joyce Byers, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Nancy Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Joyce Byers & Steve Harrington, Robin Buckley/Heather Holloway

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-05-12

Updated: 2021-05-12

Packaged: 2022-04-01 00:55:28

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 7,096

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Both boys are in agreement that prom isn't all that big of a deal, not when they're already in love, so they're okay with not being able to go. But Nancy drags Steve into prom committee duties, and of course he signs Billy up to do it with him. All that time printing tickets, hanging up posters, and decorating the gym for something they're left out of gets them longing to not miss out, so they have a little makeshift prom of their own in Steve's living room, and have a much better time than they would've at the real thing.

Memories Are Golden

The prom of '85 was just one week away. If you asked Steve how much involvement he would've have in the event, not even a month ago he would've guessed it to be nothing more than *maybe* taking a flyer home and immediately throwing it in the trash.

Because he wouldn't be able to go anyways, him and his date didn't exactly abide by the administration's rules, or society's, for that matter, so he didn't care about the whole thing, until last minute, when Nancy had successfully convinced him to be a part of the prom committee with her.

The conversation had basically been a very lengthy guilt trip, he's well aware of that, and her whole, 'best moments of our lives' speech hadn't really done much to change his mind either.

In the end, Steve had only decided he was going to do it for three reasons: he'd get extra credit in the teacher in charge of prom, the math teachers, class, he wouldn't have to go to any of his morning classes, and Robin joined in on Nancy's bullying him because her and Heather would be apart of the committee too.

So now for the next week leading up to the big day, Steve has to spend his mornings in the gym putting up the decorations for the grand march.

But it isn't all bad, because their small little task force made up of the other poor souls Nancy had rallied to do this with her is all of his friends, Nancy and Barb and Robin and Heather, with the addition of one very begrudging Billy Hargrove.

The girls were all the type you'd expect to be into this thing, the crafty ones mixed in with popularity, and everyone knew Steve would do anything to show school spirit, especially if Nancy bullied him into it, but nobody actually expected Billy of all people to even show up.

He certainly looked more likely to be the one crashing the prom than hanging up little foil stars on the walls, and anyways, rumor had it he

only was on the committee as an alternative to detention for smoking weed under the bleachers.

But Steve knew that had absolutely *not* happened, for one thing, Billy's weed stayed tightly locked up in his bedroom, thank you very much, and for another, he was there completely willingly. Steve knew that, because he'd been the one to tell Billy to sign up.

Which, when it really got right down to it, Billy honestly was the only reason Steve was even doing this whole thing. They were used to working in a couple of very limited interactions on the court or in the few classes they shared, but with the prom committee they'd be *required* to spend at least four hours together every day. It was the golden opportunity, even if that wasn't the way Nancy intended it.

So maybe Billy does show up a little late every morning on purpose, just to keep up appearances, but he's got a smile on his face, hidden behind the styrofoam coffee cup he gets from the cafeteria as he seeks out Steve and sits beside him in the bleachers to wait for that day's instruction.

"Mornin' Bill." Steve mumbles tiredly, used to coming in late every day and getting at least an extra hour of sleep most days.

Billy nods and hums in his throat as his only response, so Steve asks him, "You wake up on the wrong side of the bed this mornin'?"

And of course, in true Billy fashion, he flashes Steve his most shit eating grin, and says all nonchalant, "Always do when I wake up alone."

It's so cheesy, and very obviously meant to get to him, but Steve can't help the blush that creeps up his neck. He's still trying to think up an equally as flustering comeback, when the teacher in charge finally shows up.

She announces that this year's theme was 'under the stars', which Steve thought sounded incredibly tacky, but there was still no way it would be any worse than the godawful 'hollywood' theme from the year before. Hawkins High had a reputation for a lot of things, but creativity was *not* one of them.

They get split up into groups, Nancy and Barb in charge of the promo, the writing up, designing, and printing of the announcements and tickets, and Robin and Heather got the delicate detail work, blowing up balloons, laying down the artificial grass squares and hanging or putting in place whatever the other groups made them.

Billy and Steve, on the other hand, were stuck with all the dirty work, the manly jobs. They're the ones who have to paint the banner that's going to go over the door, and carry anything that's considered too heavy and hang anything too high (even though Barb really isn't that much shorter than them), *and* set up the tents and string the electricity to the lights in the fake lamp posts.

Quite frankly, Steve doesn't think it's fair that they have double the workload as the girls, most of the week had been dedicated to their work, but he just can't bring himself to complain about getting to watch Billy working every morning, still barely awake yet, his hair pulled up so it didn't get paint or that much glitter in it.

~~~~~

On their last day in the gym, all that's left is to sort out a few last minute details, the final squares of fake grass are laid out, lights are tested and glitter is spread out on everything. It doesn't take too awful long, so they end up with just under three hours leftover to kill.

What they're *supposed* to do is report back to their morning classes and try to catch up on all the work they've been missing out on for the entire week, but Billy isn't looking to worry about a bunch of school work, so he tries to convince the rest to skip those last few hours with him.

From Barb and Nancy he gets an instant no, which, he was honestly expecting that. They're responsible girls, and he can't blame them for giving two shits about their education. The fact of the matter is though, that he doesn't.

What he isn't expecting as much is for his best friend to tell him no, but Heather's too excited about her senior prom to get in trouble the day before it, and he can respect that.

He already knows that if Heather's not going, Robin's not either, so he waves her off before she even bothers trying to explain herself.

That just leaves Steve, and lord knows Billy's been a bad enough influence on him that he doesn't even have to ask if he's ditching, so when Mrs Mitchell and the girls leave, they follow behind until they're out in the hallway, then duck out of the back entrance of the gym.

Most of the time when people skip they just go home considering the lack of literally anything at all to do around Hawkins, but with Steve's house too far away for it to be worth leaving, and Billy's stepmom still at home, that sort of wasn't an option for them.

Usually they don't skip for those very reasons, but today they have a handwritten excuse to be out of their classes until exactly 12:15, so in a way, it isn't so much like skipping as it is just using their free time wisely. Or at least, that's how Steve rationalizes it, earning from Billy, who thought it was sweet that his former bad boy felt it necessary to make excuses for skipping, a chuckle and a warm smile.

They decide to just hang out on the school grounds, nowhere in town to go but the diner and the stores downtown, and they weren't in the mood for food nor did they have enough money to blow buying stupid shit they didn't need, so smoking and sneaking kisses by the tree line on the practice field it was.

It's nice, but Billy doesn't like the quiet, furrowed brow as he plucks blades of just growing grass trying to think of something to say that would break the silence. Steve just waits patiently with a lit cigarette burning out between his fingers for Billy to speak, listening intently when he finally says, "You know, s'a shame that I can't take you to the prom after all that work we did for it."

"Nah, prom's way overrated." Steve blows him off, not wanting him to feel bad about it, personally viewing the dance as stupid anyways, in a way sort of glad he doesn't have to go, "It's just a way to pay for new football uniforms and make kids who piqued in highschool feel good about themselves."

But Billy doesn't even laugh at that, flicking the head off a dandelion

to keep his hands busy as he basically mumbles, “Guess you had time to think ‘bout it already.”

“Yeah. I guess I just always thought dances were kind of dumb. Now that I’m not King Steve anymore I just don’t really see a reason to bother with ‘em.” Steve explains, sliding his hand over to Billy’s across the tips of cool blades of grass, linking their pinkies together and leaning his head against his shoulder, soft touches like these the only way Billy could tell the difference between an open conversation and an argument.

“Still, think it’d be nice to be able to show you off. Let ‘em know what they’ve been missing.” Billy admits, a shy crack of a smile, like he was afraid to bring it up, and it makes Steve smile back, looking straight into the vulnerability behind his blue eyes and saying so softly it’s almost a whisper, “S’not necessary, B. I’m all yours.”

Billy pulls his hand away, a flush on his cheeks that wasn’t just from the warmth of the sun, overwhelmed by the affection just a bit, not uncomfortable with it, just not used to it, and bumps his shoulder into Steve’s, telling him, “God, you’re such a sap.”

“Hey, you’re the one that wanted to take me to the prom.” Steve says, barely even defensive, making Billy smile again.

There’s a break in the conversation, both of them flustered and thinking about the other, until Steve interrupts the quiet this time, leaning back on his hands in the grass and suggesting, “We could do our own prom though, you know.”

“Whaddya mean?”

“Well, we can’t do the *real* thing, obviously, but I don’t have any other plans tomorrow. You should drop by.”

“You’re really askin’ me to be your prom date?” Billy smirks, but the vulnerable hope in his eyes gives him away, and makes Steve’s heart flutter, though he replies nonchalant, “Who else? Be there at 8:30?”

“It’s a date. See you then, pretty boy.” Billy says with a smile, leaning in to kiss Steve, but getting interrupted by his watch beeping, their

break time almost up already.

Steve chuckles and kisses his nose, and says, “Guess we better get back then.” waiting for Billy to leave first so his boyfriend had a head start to get into the school before him.

Billy throws a wink over his shoulder as he retreats towards the gym doors, and suddenly the weight of what they’d just agreed to settles with Steve.

Maybe this prom thing wasn’t as overrated as he thought, because did he ever feel over the *moon* right now, blushing like an idiot and just standing there dazedly until he hears the bell ring inside the building.

Apparently it showed too, that butterflies in his stomach feeling he had for the rest of the day, if the fact that Robin pulled him aside in the cafeteria for an emergency meeting about why he couldn’t wipe the goofy grin off his face was any indication.

He told her some lie, something about one of the teachers he got his makeup work off of cutting him some slack, and Robin doesn’t believe that, but she knows it’s none of her business, so she lets him keep smiling.

Still, as much as Steve was looking forward to this, at the end of the day when he waved at Billy from across the parking lot, he got nervous. Like, speeding back home to Loch Nora in under ten minutes on a normally fifteen minute drive nervous.

Because he still has a *lot* of shit to get done between now and tomorrow night when Billy is supposed to show up.

For one thing, his house is a disaster. He almost never cleans it until it’s too late, half-assing the dishes and overloading the washing machine and hiding things in closets usually the day before his parents were supposed to get back.

Another thing is how should he dress? He had a few fancy suits of his own from outings with his parents and past dances, but he knew Billy wouldn’t. Still, wouldn’t it be rude to underdress just because he

assumed Billy would be too poor to clean up?

And what did people even *do* at prom? Get drunk and have sex? If Billy wanted to do that he would've just said so. How was Steve supposed to figure out what else they were going to do? The rest of prom is just bad dancing and even worse food, was that something he was supposed to include?

What if he'd sent the wrong signal in the first place and it *wasn't* just going to be them? What if Billy showed up at his door with a bunch of other losers skipping out on prom night and this wasn't really special at all?

The thing is, he knows he's being irrational. Billy's not the type to care about this stuff, and even if he did he wasn't gonna like, break things off just because their little fake prom in Steve's living room wasn't perfect. That's just ridiculous.

So he tries to redirect that initial panic into productivity. Get at least *something* planned out and put together before he freaks all the way out and loses his motivation.

He decides to do it in small parts, tonight he'd start with the cleaning and getting everything he already had together, and tomorrow would be for shopping and decorating.

Because he's got such a scatterbrain, he makes a list of all the things he needed to get done before 8:30 tomorrow night, and already he feels the stress start to dissipate with each thing he gets to check off, the living room cleaned until Ruthie would approve, picking out a nice sweater he'd never worn before, fancy but not too much, and tracking down all the things he already had, a record player, the fancy wine Billy said he liked, and a couple of strings of fairy lights and tinsel.

~~~~~

The next morning he goes straight to Melvald's, with the rest of his checklist to buy candles, more decorations, a boutonnière, just to do it, and maybe something other than takeout to eat for once.

He must look as nervous as he feels, dumping his purchases on the counter, because Joyce smiles that understanding smile of hers, and asks him, “Last minute jitters before prom?”

“You could say that.” He responds breathily, trying to return the smile.

“Jonathan and Nancy decided not to go, but it sounds like it’ll be fun.” Joyce says with a nod, and Steve realizes he’s given her the wrong impression, explaining, “Oh, I’m not going to the real thing either, just hanging out with a friend tonight.”

“Well that sounds nice anyways.” She says, as she rings up his stuff remarking, “You must really like this friend to go all out like this.”

“Yeah he’s-“ Steve physically shakes his head, a reminder to stop talking before he gets himself caught, backpedaling with a shaky excuse, “I-I mean, it’s not like it’s a prom *date* , it’s just, you know, two guys hanging out.“

Joyce puts her hand on his, that same warm smile still on her face, and tells him, looking him right in the eye as if to say, ‘I know, but it’s okay’, “I’m happy for you, Steve. Have fun tonight.”

Steve nods, a flush to his cheeks as he leaves the store with not another word than, “I... Thank you Mrs. Byers.”

~~~~~

Billy knew absolutely jack and shit about school dances.

The first and only he’d ever been bothered to go to was way back in elementary school, and that didn’t exactly hold a candle to the fucking prom.

It helped some that it wasn’t the *real* thing, but Steve was talking like it might as well be, and quite frankly, he wanted it to be. This was going to be special goddamnit.

But before he can even think too much about it, he realizes none of that will matter if it turns out he can’t show, so he brings it up with

his dad at dinner.

At the table is where he's least likely to get beat if Neil said no, so that was always the time he chose to ask for things. "I know it's, uh, kind of last minute 'cause it's tomorrow night, but could I go to the prom?"

Neil quirks an eyebrow, seeming mostly uninterested, "With who?"

"Nobody as a date." Billy explains, using the cover story he'd been coming up with since the minute Steve asked him, or rather in anticipation of, "Heather has a spare ticket 'cause her actual date ditched her last minute and she asked me if I would go with her."

Neil nods, seemingly believing him, and asks, "When's it start?"

"Uh, about 8, I think, so I'll probably leave at like, 6:30 or so." Billy throws it out nervously, tapping his fingers against the underside of the table, and freezing when Neil speaks.

But he doesn't get yelled at, it's just a simple, calm, "Susan, do we have anything planned that time tomorrow?"

"No, dear. Max is going with her friends at six, but other than that..." Comes her timid response without a hitch, and Billy already knows he's in the clear before Neil gives his response, still not looking up from the table.

He agrees, but with a few conditions that Billy wouldn't dare disobey, "If you drop your sister off first, you've got yourself a deal. Just don't come home if you're drunk, and don't waste all my damned money on pictures."

Billy nods, his heart racing in anticipation of something he was pretty sure at this point wasn't going to happen, though some part of him was still waiting for the slap across the face and a never your mind as he says dutifully, "Yessir. Thank you."

~~~~~

Billy starts getting ready six hours early for two reasons: for one

thing, the sooner he's ready, the more time he had away from Neil and to psyche himself up to knock on Steve's door, and for another, his hair on a normal day takes at *least* an hour if he doesn't want it frizzing out or losing its curl or getting heavy, and this was his *prom*, he was willing to spend a whole day on his hair for the sake of looking nice, even if there were no pictures of it.

Of course Max, being the little nuisance she is, follows him to his bedroom when he goes to get ready, holding the door open with her foot so he couldn't slam it in her face, and earning herself a grumbly, "What do you want, Maxine?"

"I thought you told me you weren't going to the prom." She says it like she caught him doing something wrong, as if plans couldn't change, and it pisses Billy off a little bit.

"I'm not-" He starts to explain, cutting himself off when somewhere in the house Neil pops the tab on a beer can, a tiny sound Max probably hadn't even picked up on, but if his father was out and about in the house Billy doesn't want to admit what he's going to in front of him. He opens his door wider and ushers his step sister in, immediately shutting it behind her and finishing what he was saying, "I'm not going to the prom."

She quirks an eyebrow, through Billy's eyes maybe looking a bit too much like her step-dad when she does it, "Why'd you tell Neil you were?"

"Crashing the after party. Thought it'd look better if I said I went." He just shrugs, half assing the lie, and, picking up on that, Max fires back smugly, "You're lying."

Billy snaps, no longer looking at her while he starts lining his shit up on his makeshift vanity, getting ready to get ready, "Yeah, I am. But it's really none of your business, shitbird."

"Are you going on a date or something?" She looks at him knowingly, if not a little surprised, and asks as it dawns on her, "Oh my god, do you have a boyfriend?"

"Maxine Nicole!" He hisses through his teeth, turning to glare at her

and seeing that she's holding his hair spray that he literally just put out, probably planning on stealing it, "Jesus, give me that."

She lets him snatch it out of her hands and puts it back in its spot on the vanity she told him didn't count as a vanity multiple times, rolling her eyes, "Yeesh. I'll take that as a yes then."

"If you're going to tell on me Max, I swear to god-" He starts, defensive, more vulnerability in his voice than intended, but Max insists honestly, the most not bratty she's been since she stepped into his room, "I'm not, I wouldn't."

Though it doesn't last very long, her not being a brat, because she immediately cracks a big smile and asks Billy, "Who is he though?"

"Mind your own, Max, Christ." Billy blows her off, catching glimpse of himself in the mirror and taking note of the barely there flush to his cheeks, pointing to the door and telling his meddling step sister, "Out."

"Awww, Billy-" She tries to whine, but he cuts her off, " No. Out. Of. My. Room."

But Max offers quickly, like it'll change his mind, "I'll do your hair if you let me stay."

And maybe it doesn't immediately change his mind, but it does successfully stump him, because he's asking her, equal parts genuine curiosity and sarcasm, "Why would I let you touch my hair?"

"No reason." Max says, looking down at his carpet, definitely overplaying the bashfulness in bringing up her answer to appeal to Billy's emotions, "I just thought, and maybe it's stupid but like, most guys have their *mom*s to fuss over them for prom, but, you know, you don't, so I wanted to, I don't know, be a good sister and do that for you or, whatever."

Billy sighs, that had been exactly what he was thinking about all night last night, how his momma would be proud of him for finding a way to do this with the person, the boy he loved, and how she could've been there to do exactly what Max said, so he agrees,

“Alright shitbird, guilt trip successful. You’re not kicked out.”

Max claps her hands together and sits on her brother's bed, getting all of Billy's wrinkled button ups tossed at her from where they had been previously shoved, unfolded into a dresser drawer, and a command to, “Help me pick a shirt.”

She asks him while she's unfolding all of his shirts he'd thrown at her and spreading them all out over Billy's bed, “Are you going to button it.”

“What do you think?”

“Billy. It's your *prom*.”

“Fine. One more button.”

“Two?” She tries to bargain, but he shuts it down again, making her giggle when he jokes, his tone level like it's a real threat, “One or I'm going shirtless.”

“Then I pick.. this blue one.” Max says and puts her hand on a navy blue, quarter sleeve shirt after careful consideration of holding each button up up to Billy and thinking hard about it, but one more once over and she changes her mind, handing Billy a white shirt with snap buttons instead, “No, no, no, wait, this one with full sleeves is better. Yeah, that one for sure.”

“Sleeves it is.” Billy says taking the shirt and hanging it on the door so he'd remember to iron it, crudely shoving the rest of the button ups back into the drawer, and asking Max, “Will I need to wear like, a coat or something?”

She shrugs asking him smugly, “That depends on who it is.”

“Sensitive information.” Billy says immediately, when she looks like she's going to argue shutting her down before she can say anything, “Which means I'm not tellin' you.”

“Can I guess?” Max asks, making her case by reasoning with him sweetly, “Please? You wouldn't be telling me that way.”

He genuinely considers it for a minute, and decides it's whatever, in his head assuming there was no way Max would be able to figure it out, so he waves his hand with an eye roll, giving her the go ahead to start guessing.

Her first question is, "Okay, okay. Is it.. someone I know?"

"Yep."

Max furrows her brow, and asks, "Do I like him?" To which Billy shrugs and responds, "Probably."

"Um, is it..." Max snaps her fingers, an idea coming to her, "Is it Tommy?"

But again she's shut down, because for somebody she's supposed to probably like, she sure does a lot of complaining about Tommy, and he calls her on it, "Do you like Tommy?"

Max hums thoughtfully, taking a second guess, "I guess not. Is it Keith?"

Billy shakes his head, giving her the most confused look she'd ever seen on his face as he asks, or basically exclaims, "Who the fuck is *Keith*?"

"Well excuse me for not knowing a lot of guys around here!" Max says, defensive, making Billy roll his eyes again and turn back to digging through his drawers for a decent pair of jeans to wear with a button up, most of them stained and worn.

"Not Tommy, not Keith, who's left?" She thinks hard then gasps, connecting something in her mind, a devious, knowing little smile on her face, "Is it Steve?"

Billy doesn't answer her, quite frankly doesn't know what he should say. It's his fault, letting her guess between the only three boys his age in town she apparently knew, but now that Max knew who his mystery boyfriend was he wasn't feeling so hot.

Honestly, some part of him is expecting Neil to come busting through the door any second, like this was some sort of run around way of

finding him out, but after a few minutes of her squealing like teenage girls do, he realizes all he has to face is an excited little sister.

He flushes, and asks her over his shoulder, his forcing his tone to sound bored, “Are you done?”

“Yes.” Max says, nodding, but she smiles wide and dissolves into a fit of giggles again, covering her mouth with her hands when Billy crosses his arms, and insists, “Okay, okay, I’m done!”

“Good.” Billy says, but he can’t help cracking a smile. He angles his mirror down towards the floor and sits in front of it, telling his sister lightly to, “Help me with my hair then, shitbird.”

Max sits behind him, and runs her fingers through his hair, “You should’ve put curlers in it or something last night.”

Billy rolls his eyes, realizing as he does so for the dozen things time since Max barged in that she maybe learned that from him, deciding that doesn’t even warrant a response, and hands Max the comb and one of the many cans of hairspray off of his vanity.

She sits up on her knees, and brushes back the hairs just behind his ears that always frizz out and lose their curl, holding them at the back of his hair with a bobby pin, one of the blond ones she bought specifically for him so he could use them without immediately getting caught using ‘girly’ things, but had so far been too scared to anyways.

It looks strange on him, looks more like something Max would wear than him, but honestly he doesn’t hate it, so he lets her keep going, only frowning a little when she adds a pearl adorned hair clip, big enough it looks more like a fancy brooch, to the back of his hair.

She sprays it with so much hairspray it’s tacky, scrunching it up so his curls are tighter, and smoothing the sides so they won’t come unclipped.

When every curl is in its place and approved by Billy, who insists he’s not in the least bit emotional about what Max had said early, that thing about having nobody but her to fuss over him, she hops up,

telling him to, "Wait one minute." while she runs to her room.

She returns with her bulky pink Caboodles box, the one that has all of her mostly unused makeup in it, tapping him on the shoulder and telling him, "Alright, turn towards me."

Her plan didn't work though, at least he's almost positive it was her plan to break down his defenses just so she could use him as her dress up doll anyways, but he isn't having it, telling her quickly to "Put that shit away, Max."

"Why? You wear makeup everyday." Max observes simply, making Billy hiss and tell her to lower her voice, "Yeah, but never the extra strength shit that makes your eyelashes curly and your face pretty. Neil will sniff this out the second I step out of this room."

Max just shrugs, "Then I'll make sure he doesn't see your face. It's not a big deal."

"He'll make it into one."

"I think your senior prom is an even bigger deal, though."

Billy sighs, once again losing to her arguing skill, and turning to face her like she told him, "You owe me if I get caught like this."

Max rolls her eyes and does her magic, each second that passes Billy regretting agreeing to turning the control of his appearance over to his little sister, expecting to come out of this looking like her Diva doll, fidgeting more and more the longer it takes her.

Just before he's about to panic, Max tells him, "All done." and lets him look in the mirror.

He blinks repeatedly at his own reflection, surprised to see he didn't have sparkly eyeshadow up to his eyebrows or rouge on his cheeks, just a tasteful amount of lip gloss and a copper tint to his eyelids, framed by darker than usual eyelashes and the smallest bit of eyeliner.

She gets impatient after a few minutes of Billy not saying anything, and pushes his shoulders to turn him around again to look at her,

staring at him until she decides what she thinks is missing.

She hurries to the upright jewelry box in her mother's room, and brings him back a clip on pearl earring for his right ear, opposite the chain of silver stars she already picked for his left.

"Here, it'll look better if you have earrings in both ears." She reaches up, pushing his hair out of the way and clipping the earring on, letting him do the screw on the back himself so she didn't make it too tight.

Billy lowers his hand and scrunches his nose, leaning in slightly towards the mirror, "They don't match."

"It looks nice though. You look really pretty." She tells him honestly, not realizing the impact the simple compliment, though not so simple for somebody like him, has on her brother until he's trying to subtly blink away tears behind mascara coated lashes, pretending like that wasn't the case and telling her, "Whatever, it's too late to change it now if you want to be on time."

He does one last once over himself in the mirror, though he knows he's going to be using his car windows for the same purpose at the last minute, and shoos Max out of his bedroom door, trying to hurry out of the house before Neil can stop him and see him all dolled up.

He's got one hand around the door knob and his keys through his belt loop when his dad does stop him, his heart just about stopping as Neil calls from the other room, "Do you have flowers for the girl?"

"I have a corsage in the car." Billy lies, hoping his tone is sure enough for Neil to buy it.

"Good. Just remember what I said, boy." Neil says, still from the living room, so Billy lets his posture relax a bit and breathes out a quiet sigh, saying casually, "Get Max to her friends, don't spend any money, and don't come home drunk, I got it, dad."

"Watch the attitude, William." Neil says low, the air going still for a minute until he adds, "And have fun tonight."

"Yessir." Billy says, ushering Max quickly out the front door, sighing

when it closes behind them.

~~~~~

Billy drops Max off at the Wheeler's, just driving around Hawkins until it's time to show up at Steve's, making sure to stop past the Holloway's place just in case Neil went asking around wanting to know if anybody saw his car in the neighborhood.

At 8, he decides he doesn't want to show up empty handed, buying Steve some flowers like he'd lied and said he had for Heather from Melvald's, not understanding the knowing look the cashier lady has in her eye when he brings a dinky bouquet of flowers to the checkout counter.

He rings the doorbell at 8:30 on the dot, checking himself out one last time in Steve's window while he waits, fifty cent roses held behind his back.

On the other side of the door, Steve stands in the dining room, now adorned with cheap party decorations that would've made his mother pitch a fit, waiting a whole thirty seconds before he goes to answer it, trying to collect himself first.

Billy smiles wide, and, as cheesy as it was, seeing him standing there all dressed up taking Steve's breath away and stealing the words right off his tongue, Billy having to invite himself in because Steve was busy catching flies.

He hands him the flowers, nodding towards the silver tinsel wrapped around the banister, the stars hanging in the archway that lead into the living room that were almost identical to the ones they hung from the basketball hoops at school and saying, "Place looks nice."

"Oh, uh, thanks." Steve says, quickly adding, "You know, you look nice too."

Billy smiles softly, looking at him with that 'you're an idiot Steve Harrington' look he was so used to by now, "C'mon, Stevie, we've been dating for four months now, you don't gotta be all awkward with me still."

"I'm not, I mean it, you look really good, Billy." Steve says, smiling now that it's his turn to fluster Billy.

"Oh by the way, I almost forgot. Got you this just because." He remembers, handing Billy a box with a floral pin inside, pink roses with lace, and telling him expectantly, "It's a boutonnière."

But Billy doesn't open it, just raises an eyebrow and says, "I thought you did corsages for prom?"

"Corsages are for the girls."

"Ah. Got it." He says it like he already knew that, like he was hoping maybe Steve *didn't*, so Steve offers, not really understanding it, but knowing what he means all the same, "It came as a set, I still have the corsage upstairs, if you want it."

Billy nods and pins the boutonnière to Steve's shirt instead, explaining simply, "Just so we match."

Steve runs upstairs and gets the corsage, giving Billy a minute to actually appreciate just how much went into decorating this place, snickering to himself when he imagines Steve having to stand on a step ladder to put the string lights so high up on the wall.

Steve tosses Billy the box from the top of the steps, letting him open it while he comes back down and ties it around his wrist, having to tie it twice because he put it on the wrong way the first time.

Billy asks him, shaking his wrist to make sure the bow is tight enough, "So what's our official plan for tonight, Stevie?"

"Honestly I don't really know. I'm sort of just winging it here, I don't know what you even do at prom."

"You never went at all?" Billy asks, surprised miss priss hadn't dragged him along to their junior prom last year.

"Nope. Like I said, overrated." Steve confirms, and Billy smiles wide, saying, "I'm sure I got a few ideas in mind then."

~~~~~

Billy's idea basically consisted mainly of drinking all that fancy wine Steve had gotten out of the cellar specifically for this, shoving his tongue down Steve's throat, and complaining about the real prom happening up at the school.

Honestly, Steve suspects things wouldn't have been so different had they actually gone, but he can tell the fact that they weren't able to go was still bothering Billy, judging by the sheer number of times he brings it up.

After what must be the tenth time that night Billy brought up Heather and Robin getting to go, Steve asks him, "Do you wish we were there?"

"No, that's the thing. I couldn't give a damn less about the whole dance, a thousand times over I'd rather just be here with you."

"But?"

"But I wish we had the *choice* to go, you know? It's just, bugging me that if we had genuinely wanted to go, we couldn't've." Billy rants, very obviously having been holding this in, "And I keep thinking about all the other gay kids who don't have a big empty house or a safe place to do what we're doin'."

"Yeah, but it's really not a big deal. Prom is pretty much all for the parents anyways, and the way I see it we, and all the other people like us, we're so used to disappointing them, what's it matter if we don't go?"

"Just, I don't care about the event or whatever, but it feels like we're missing out on something. Like maybe we should've just swallowed our pride and went with Hetty and Robin anyways."

Steve stands up abruptly, picking up their wine glasses and kicking the coffee table all the way over to the far wall to clear the floor, offering Billy his hand, "I know you feel like you're robbing me of something by us not going, but we don't need all of that for this to be good. I meant it when I said that's superficial to me anyways. We can make it mean something to us."

Billy looks up at him, still bothered deep down, but out of ways to argue about it, and accepts Steve's hand, wrapping his arms around the back of his neck when he pulls him close by his waist.

It's not really a slow dance as much as it is an excuse to just be close to one another, to breathe each other in and sneak kisses and be sappy, but that's what this whole thing was about. They could've just hung out tonight if they wanted, and honestly they probably would've anyways, but they called it a prom, put that title to it that made both of their hearts pitapat.

Steve had always heard, even felt it a few times before, that when you were with the person you loved, everyone and everything else would melt away around you until it was just you, but somehow, this was different than that.

Because that would mean there were times when his world *didn't* revolve around Billy, and that there was ever a moment when he could focus on anything but the boy he loved, and that just wasn't true.

This wasn't performative, wasn't a relationship formed on the status of being able to show off that they were better for being in love either, this was simply Billy and Steve, dancing in their tennis shoes on Ruthie's carpet, snickering when a particularly sappy song came on the radio, barely able to be separated long enough to turn to side B, falling in love all over again under the stars.

~~~~~

When the wine bottles are all empty and the stack of records has been spun through, Steve's schnocked, and insisting they get a picture, searching the house for an old Polaroid camera and making Billy stand with him in front of the fairy lights strung

They only had three chances to get a good picture, no new packs of film and only a few left in the camera, so Steve took all three.

The first one was upside down and so off center he was hardly in it, Steve being *maybe* a little more drunk than he thought, and the second Billy closed his eyes because the flash was too bright, but it

didn't matter too much anyways because the film didn't develop properly and the picture was nothing but reddish-yellow tinted blackness anyways.

The third one by some chance turns out fine, maybe a little blurred because he moved and still not quite centered right, but it's a picture, something to hold onto the memory of this night forever when the hangover wore off and things got a little blurry, and that was important to the both of them, for different reasons.

As soon as it develops, a little 8 by 10 of Billy kissing his cheek, Steve runs upstairs to hang it on the cork board above his desk before it gets misplaced, dating it and doodling a little heart with a S+B inside it, hiding the picture behind a ribbon for a middle school art contest and a picture of him and his parents.

Billy hooks his chin over his shoulder, his hands traveling a bit lower than Steve's waist this time as he watches what he's doing. He hums and asks, when Steve stands up straighter and turns in his arms to face him, "So? What have you got planned for the after prom, Stevie?"